My dear friends, today is the 4th of August, 1998, and we are in the Upper Hamlet for our Questions and Answers hour.

I will take one question directly from the audience, and then one from my desk top. I would like first to take a question directly from the Sangha.

Dear Thay, yesterday you spoke about contemplating impermanence in accordance with the Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*. My question is this: when we contemplate impermanence, do we include in that contemplation the phenomena of time and space? Should they also be considered as impermanent?*

We know that when we really touch the nature of impermanence, we also touch the nature of interbeing. Impermanence makes life possible, makes things possible. To be impermanent means not to be the same thing in two consecutive moments, and there is always something coming in and something going out. Every thing is interacting with every other thing, and therefore touching impermanence is also touching interbeing. Interbeing means you don't have a separate existence, you inter-are with everything else.

When we contemplate space, we know that space cannot be space by itself alone. Space has to interbe with time and matter, and everything. When we look into the nature of space, we also touch the nature of impermanence, we also touch the nature of interbeing, and we can see everything else in space. We can see matter in space; we can see time in space. Suppose we talk about spring. What is spring? Spring sounds like time—spring is followed by summer, then fall and winter—but spring is very much involved with space, because when it is spring here in Europe, it is not spring in Australia. So we know that in space there is time, and in time there is space. Even what we call the present moment cannot be by itself alone. The present moment has to be with past moments and future moments.

When you look at the sun in the morning—where I sit in the morning I always see the sun rising from the horizon—you might think that you are seeing the sun of the present moment; but scientists tell us that that is the sun of eight minutes ago. The image of the sun you see is an image sent by the sun to you eight minutes ago. So the present moment has to do with space, not only with time. But you can still live in the present moment even if you know that this is the image of the sun eight minutes ago. The present moment has to do with the "here", and therefore time and space are not separate entities, and looking into the one, we see the all. The insight of interbeing helps us to understand better the nature of non-self, the nature of impermanence.

Many teachers, many philosophers, spoke about impermanence. Heraclitus and Confucius also spoke about impermanence, but the impermanence spoken of by the Buddha is not a philosophy. It is an instrument for your practice of looking deeply. So use the key of impermanence in order to unlock the door of reality, and when you use the key of impermanence you unlock the nature of interbeing, of no self, of emptiness. That is why you should not look on impermanence as a notion, a theory, or a philosophy, but as an instrument offered by the Buddha so that we can practice looking deeply and discover the true nature of reality.

Thay, I have just been nominated to be a judge for the year 1999, in order to judge people. How do I reconcile justice and compassion?

I believe that true justice should have compassion in it. When someone does something harmful, destructive, the destruction is done not only to the person who is the victim, but it is also done to the person who has committed the destruction. We all know that every time we say something unskillful, that can damage our relationship to the other person, making him or her suffer, we know that we have also done harm to ourselves, and created suffering for ourselves. That comes from our lack of skillfulness, our lack of mindfulness, and our lack of compassion, and we suffer as the other person suffers. Maybe not right now, but a little bit later we will suffer. The real cause of the action is our ignorance, our lack of skillfulness.

In any kind of relationship there is always a willingness not to make the other person suffer: "Darling, I don't want to make you suffer." That is true, but because we are not mindful enough, we do not have the right perception of what things are, and because of the negative habit energy in us, we may do things that cause others to suffer. That is not out of my willingness, because I may have made a vow to make you happy, to make you suffer less. That is why we should try to look into the nature of interbeing to see that we ourselves may be the victims of a collective consciousness, of the transmission of negative seeds by our ancestors, by our parents. If we make others suffer, that is because we are also victims.

So if we know how to look at the so-called criminals, we will have compassion. Society has created them like that; they have not been lucky, they have been born into a situation where social conditions, and their parents and other influences, have created that kind of behavior, and that person is very much the victim of the situation. If we see that, we see the nature of interbeing in that kind of act, we will be able to be compassionate, and the punishment that we propose in that case will be lighter, because we want justice. That's not only understanding; that's not only compassion—although there is understanding that has brought compassion—but that's also justice.

Consider a sea pirate who rapes a young girl belonging to the boat people. If you have a gun you can kill him, but you cannot help him. He may have been born to a very poor fisherman along the coast, his father and his grandfather living a very hard life. In order to forget that kind of hardship it may be that they used to drink in the evening, and they came home late at night. Perhaps the mother of the young man did not know how to read and to write and to give him a good education, and the young boy played with delinquents. When he reached the age of fourteen or fifteen he had to go to sea and help his father in the fishing business. Then when his father passed away he had to continue the business, and his life was very hard. And suddenly someone said, "You only have to make it once. The refugees might bring a little bit of gold with them, so if we stop just one refugee boat and take the gold and their valuables, then we can get out of this situation of chronic poverty. Just one!" The young fisherman agreed, and there on the high sea they caught the boat people, and he saw another person violating a lady. He looked around, and he didn't see any policemen. So he just said, "I have never tried this. I want to try it once." And then he

became a molester, a rapist.

If you were on the boat and you had a gun, and you shot him in order to save the girl, you could kill him, but you could not help him. Of course you would try to do anything in order to save the girl, but if you cannot, you will shoot him. You want the girl to be alive, not to be raped, and the sea pirate not to be shot, but if there is no other way, you might choose to kill him. But he was born into that life, and he has been a victim since he has come to life. Nobody has helped him. Educators, legislators, politicians, businessmen, humanitarians, humanists, no one has helped him, and that is why he is what he is there—he is a victim. If you kill him, you can call it justice, but I think that is less than justice, because he has not been helped at all.

When I heard news of events such as this, I could not eat. It's difficult to eat your breakfast when you hear this kind of news, and I had to do walking meditation in the woods in order to digest that kind of hardship. During sitting meditation one night, I saw that if I had been born like that pirate, in the coastal area of Thailand, and I had such a father, such a mother, I would now be a sea pirate. We are products of our society, of our environment, to a very large extent. That's why looking deeply helps us to understand and to have compassion. With compassion, you can always offer a kind of justice that will contain more patience, understanding and tolerance.

Here is another related question: *Thay, what are your views on capital punishment? Suppose someone has killed ten children. Why should he be allowed to live on?*

Ten people are dead; now you want another one, you want eleven. A person who has killed ten children is a sick person. Of course we want to lock him up to prevent him killing more, but that is a sick person, and we have to find ways to help that person. Killing him does not help him, and does not help us. There are others like him in society, and looking at him deeply we know that something is wrong with our society; our society has created people like that. Therefore, looking at him, we can see in the light of interbeing the other elements that have produced him. That is how your understanding arises in yourself, and then you see that that person is there for you to help, and not to punish. Of course you have to lock him up for the safety of other children, but locking him up is not the only thing you can do. We can do other things to help him. Punishing is not the only thing, we can do much better.

Recently Buddhist books on meditation, Buddhist magazines, and even Dharma talks have been offered in prisons, and many inmates have been practicing accordingly. Several of them have gotten relief, and have been able to live peacefully in prison. I myself get a number of letters from prisoners, and many of them come from prisons in North America—who have read my books. One person said, "Thay, when I stand above the staircase and look down, and see other inmates running up and down, I can see their suffering, their agitation. I hope they can do as I do, walking down and up the staircase in mindfulness, following my breathing. When I do that, I feel peace within myself, and when I feel peace within myself I can see very clearly the suffering of other inmates." That person has been able to create, to give rise to the compassion within him. You know, when we have compassion in our hearts, we don't suffer too much. When compassion is there in our hearts, we are not the person who suffers the most.

There is another prisoner who received a copy of *Being Peace*, a photocopy, and later on he got the real book *Being Peace*, so he had two copies. He had stopped smoking, but he still kept some tobacco. One day the fellow next to his cell banged on the wall and shouted to ask for some tobacco. Although he did not smoke anymore, he wanted to offer him this tobacco. And he took the first page of *Being Peace*, and he wrapped some tobacco in it, and sneaked it to the other side, with the hope that the other person might enjoy being peace. He himself had enjoyed being peace, and had started practicing sitting meditation in his cell. He just gave a small amount of that tobacco, and the next time he used page two, then page three…He was on death row. Finally he had transferred the whole set of copied pages to the other prisoner. It was wonderful—the other prisoner began to practice in his cell, and became very quiet. In the beginning he had banged, and shouted, and cursed. But finally he became very subdued and very calm, and he was released. In order to thank the other person, he passed in front of the cell, and they looked at each other, and together they recited one sentence from the book, which they both knew by heart. That prisoner on death row was able to write a whole book on his practice, within his cell, and the book has been published by a publisher outside.

So it is clear that punishment is not the only thing we can do. There is much more we can do in order to help. Transformation and healing is possible in these difficult situations. Another prisoner wrote to me, saying, "Thay, I am very surprised to find that I can still retain my humanness in prison, and that I have not gone mad. That is thanks to the practice. My only hope is that one day when I am released, and someone comes to see me and looks at my face, and says, 'With the amount of suffering he endured in prison, yet he can look like that…" that would be wonderful, the greatest reward that I could get." He said that the conditions in which he lived, the suffering he endured in jail, you could not imagine. But he has managed, in order to survive, to keep his humanness alive through all these difficulties. If we suffer less outside here, and have a little bit of time, of course we can do something to help those inside. That is why killing that person only reveals our weakness. We surrender. We don't know what to do any more, and we give up. That is a cry of despair, when you have to kill people. I hope that together we can practice looking deeply in order to find better means than to approve of capital punishment. My answer to the question is that not only can we reconcile justice and compassion, but we can also demonstrate that true justice must have compassion and understanding in it.

(Bell)

What do you do when you give joy? How do you offer joy to a person in a mindful way? You talked once about practicing mindfulness so that you've enlarged your heart, so that you can receive any suffering without being harmed by it. Can you talk about this more?

It seems to me that when there is joy with you, that joy will not only benefit yourself, but also benefit the people around you,

provided that joy is true joy. True joy is the joy that can help our bodies and our consciousness. Joy is a nutriment, a factor of nutrition. In the Buddhist circles the practice of meditation is described as daily food, and in the practice of meditation joy and concentration are very important elements. If while practicing meditation you don't feel joy, then something is wrong with your practice. If you suffer during the practice of walking and sitting meditation, I don't think you are doing the right practice. The joy in you will have an effect on your body and your consciousness, and it will have an effect on the people who are in touch with you.

When you practice looking deeply you know how that joy has come to you, based on what conditions. You might like that joy to continue to come, and you may like to look at the other person, and suggest to him or to her that if these conditions are sufficient, then she will also have the same kind of joy that will nourish her and the people around her. So share your joy in these two ways. Even if you don't want to share your joy, it will be shared, because when you are joyful, you are happy, you inspire us. You make the atmosphere around us light and the air easy to breathe. You can do other things; you can make suggestions and collaborate with other people in order to create the kind of collective joy that will benefit many people. We chant every day: "I vow to offer joy to one person in the morning, and to relieve the suffering of one person in the evening." But that is the minimum, because if you can offer joy to one person, you are already offering joy to many people, because the joy of one person can affect many other people.

The practice of looking deeply will bring insight, and will help our hearts to open up. When our hearts are larger, we have a better capacity to receive, and to embrace the negative elements in order to transform them. If you suffer too much, that is because your heart is still small. According to the teaching of the Four Unlimited Minds, it is possible that the practice of looking deeply will help you to understand better and better, and as your understanding grows, your compassion and your loving-kindness will grow also. In this teaching, love and understanding are the same thing. Compassion and loving-kindness are made of a substance called understanding, and understanding cannot be possible without looking deeply into the matter.

The Buddha said, "Suppose you have a cup of pure water; if you have a handful of salt, and you pour it into that water and stir it up, you cannot drink it anymore, because it's too salty. But if you take the same amount of salt, and pour it into the river, then the river is so large that it is not affected, and all of us can continue to drink the water from the river. The river is enormous, that is why it has the capacity to receive, to embrace and to transform. If our hearts are big, we can do very much the same thing. We suffer because our hearts are small; it means that our understanding and compassion are too limited." This is a wonderful Dharma talk that the Buddha gave to the young novice Rahula. He said, "Rahula, practice to be like the earth. Why? No matter what people pour onto the earth, whether it's milk, cream, flowers, perfume or urine, excrement, the earth will not discriminate. It will receive them all, and the earth will not suffer. Why? Because the earth is large, and in no time at all the earth can transform all these things into flowers and green leaves. So practice, Rahula, in order to be like the earth. You can accept, receive, and embrace everything, and you don't have to suffer. Sometime later you can transform all this garbage into flowers again. Practice like the air; no matter what you throw into it, the air can receive, embrace and transform it, and that is because the air is large. Practice in order to be like water. Water has the same capacity of receiving, embracing and transforming. And practice to be like fire, because whatever you give to fire, whether it's beautiful or ugly, clean or dirty, the fire will burn them all, and reduce everything to ash. Because the fire is large, the fire has the capacity to transform. That is why, Rahula, you should practice like the earth, like the water, like the air, like the fire, so that your heart becomes unlimited. Anything negative, any insult, any action that is unkind to you, you can embrace all, and you don't have to suffer, because your heart is so large. That is why it is said in the sutra that if you suffer too much, that is because your heart is still not large. In order to make your heart large, the practice of looking deeply will help, because it will bring understanding. When understanding is there, compassion and forgiveness will be possible.

(Bell)

Thay, what do you mean when you say to go back to our religious roots? How can we do that and continue to study and practice Buddhism, which is so practical and helpful?

I think we have to look into our religious roots, because sometimes we are not capable of identifying our spiritual roots. If you are a Buddhist, then you know that Buddha is a root, but you are aware that before the Buddha there was already something—the Buddha was somebody who also had roots. So your roots did not begin with the Buddha. To inquire about the Buddha and the ancestors of the Buddha is important.

When you are a Christian, of course Jesus Christ is your spiritual root, but before Christianity there were other things. Therefore it is interesting and even exciting to inquire about our roots. Our roots can be very old, and our roots can also be new. We inherit things like democracy and freedom. The people who made democracy and freedom possible for us to enjoy are our roots also, so to go back and search for our roots is a very joyful, very important thing. Of course, we will encounter negative aspects and elements, but that does not prevent us going back to our own source. Our roots are also the roots of many people around us. If we can go back to our roots and try to discover the real values, the jewels contained in that tradition, we will be able to benefit many people who have come from these roots. This morning a young person asked me what should she do if she is in love with a young man who belongs to another religious tradition, since she doesn't want to betray her roots. She is a Buddhist, and the other family might require that she abandon her Buddhism to become a Catholic.

I would like to tell you a story. Thirty five years ago I had a student who fell in love with a young man who was Catholic, and the family of that young man required that the young lady abandon the practice of Buddhism in order to be baptized as a Catholic. That was the basic condition for the marriage, and she suffered very much. Her family was also opposed to that. She cried and cried, and one day she came to me. I said that Buddhism is not there to make you unhappy. Buddhism is not an obstacle, so I think in the name of the Buddha I can tell you that you can become a Catholic and marry him, but I would like to make a recommendation. You have received The Five Mindfulness Trainings; you should continue to look on them as the guidelines of your life. You don't have to be called a Buddhist; you only have to be a true Buddhist within yourself. Live

accordingly and practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, and that would make me happy enough. She was so joyful that she was allowed to marry the person she loved. But she did not sleep during that night, and the next morning she came very early, and she said, "Thay, a tradition that is so embracing, so tolerant, so open, if I abandon it and turn my back to it, I am not a person of value. A tradition that is so strict, that has no tolerance, that is not able to understand, how could I formally identify myself with it?" So she just refused to get married to that person. I thought that I would help her get married to that young man, but I caused the opposite to happen. Today, thirty–five years later, she is here somewhere in this Sangha.

When I was in Korea a few years ago, I participated in the first dialogue between Buddhists and Christians, and I said that many young people have suffered due to being caught in that kind of situation. So I proposed that we should be able to allow Buddhists and Christians to marry each other, with the condition that the young man would learn and also practice the tradition of the young woman, and the young woman would also learn and practice the tradition of the young man. Instead of having one root, you have two roots. Why not? If you love mangoes, you are free to continue to eat mangoes, but no one forbids you to eat pineapples or oranges. Your favorite fruit is the mango, yes, but you don't betray your mango when you eat pineapple. I think it's too narrow-minded, even stupid, to enjoy only mango, when there are so many different fruits around in the world. Spiritual traditions are like spiritual fruits, and you have the right to enjoy them. It is possible to enjoy two traditions, to take the best of two traditions and live with that. If you like to eat Italian food, you can still enjoy French and Chinese cooking. You cannot say. "I have to be faithful to my Italian cooking"—that's too funny.

This year I would like to publish another book, as a continuation of my *book Living Buddha, Living Christ*. I would like to publish the book with the title: *Buddha and Jesus as Brothers.* In fact, they could have taken each other's hands and practiced walking meditation, so why not the two of you, one as a Buddhist and one as a Christian? You are the continuation of the Buddha, and you are the continuation of Jesus Christ. That is only beautiful, if you can share your wisdom, your insights, and you can learn from each other and enrich yourselves. That is what I envision for the future, that we remove the barriers between different spiritual traditions, and we behave as people do in the circle of psychotherapists. They enjoy and learn from all other traditions, and I think that each tradition of psychotherapy has something to offer. It's too narrow if we only want to be faithful to one school of psychotherapy.

You are welcome to continue your practice of Buddhist meditation, because you find it practical and helpful, transforming and healing. But you can think of other people who have come from the same tradition as you, and who have not encountered the practice. You can do it by sharing your Buddhist practice, and also proposing to them that you go back to your spiritual roots, and you might discover things that you have not seen. You might begin anew, so that your tradition will become very refreshing, something that can provide true answers to the questions of the new generations, and that will benefit many people. When I say that you have to go back to your roots, that does not mean that you have to abandon the Buddhist practice that you enjoy now. But the Buddhist practice will help you to understand more deeply, so that your work of transformation and renewing of your tradition will be possible; and especially so that your heart will open to embrace the people who do not seem to be open and understanding enough when they try to transmit their tradition and values to the new generations of people.

(Bell)

When I have to work a problem out, I find it helpful sometimes to speak out loud, but I wonder if that is helpful to the practice, or whether it is best to keep this questioning quiet?

I think you must feel free to speak to yourself, while waiting for a Sangha to be set up. But I think that setting up a Sangha is so important. You have to identify right away the second member of your Sangha, even today, even if he or she is not here, you have to identify him or her and make a phone call right away.

You know that elements of our Sangha are always there. That may be a tree, that may be a rock, that may be the blue sky, that may be a path for walking meditation, and you can talk to them right now. Your little boy, your daughter, can be a member of your Sangha. So please, take time to look. Members of your future Sangha may be already there. With a little bit of the practice of looking deeply, you can already identify them. It's very urgent. Taking refuge in the Sangha is a very urgent task. Without a Sangha, we cannot continue our practice for a long time.

In my country, people used to say that when a tiger leaves her mountain and goes to the lowlands, she will be caught by humans and killed. A practitioner leaving her Sangha will abandon her practice very soon. So if you have left your Sangha, you have to go back right away. Or if you have not been in touch with a Sangha, try your best to identify and belong to one, and to improve the quality of your Sangha. I remember in a retreat in America there was someone who was going to South Africa, and she asked how she could continue her practice if she was away from her Sangha. I told her that on her arrival she had to set up a Sangha right away. You don't need people to kneel down and receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings in order to be members of your Sangha. Every one that you meet, everyone that you do business with, may become members of your Sangha, because the way you walk, the way you sit, the way you drink tea, may affect him or her. If you have peace, freedom, solidity and joy in these things, people will be attracted to you. If you are pleasant to them, then whatever you propose for them to do, such as sitting down and having tea quietly, they will do. Although you don't use Buddhist terms, although you don't burn incense and bow like this, you can already set up a Sangha. Intelligent practice does not need a lot of appearance. Slowly, people will inquire about your tradition, and you will show them little by little. You begin with things that people can enjoy the most first. So please talk to yourself today or tomorrow, but don't waste a minute, use your time to form your Sangha right now.

Bonjour, Thay. Je me sens mal a l'aise, lorsque les personnes disent que le Zen est une secte. Que faut-il les repondre? I feel ill at ease when people say that Zen is a sect. How should I answer them?

I don't know. (Laughter.) If you say Zen is not a sect, that does not seem to help. And if you say Zen is a sect, well, that does

not help either. People have an idea about a sect as something that can cause damage to their children and to members of their family, whose practice can cause their family to break, can take away their daughter, take away their son, and take away their husband. Even if you are the best Zen organization, if your organization produces such phenomena, and if they call you a sect, you are not a truly Buddhist center of practice. So it depends on the content. You cannot just use your time to argue whether Zen is a sect or not a sect. I think we should invite people to come and participate in our activities and our life. Once they see that this practice is providing people with more understanding, more communication, and more compassion, then they will know that it is something that is important and useful to society and to mankind.

People have ideas, and if we go around and try to change their ideas, we won't have enough time. I remember once I was walking with many people in Philadelphia, asking for the bombing in Vietnam to stop. A reporter came to me and asked me: "Are you from the North or are you from the South?" To him, if I was from the North, I would be anti-American, a Communist; and if I were from the South, I would be an anti-Communist, and so on. I was walking mindfully, and he was holding out the microphone, and I stopped for a second, and I said, "I am from the center." They have an idea, and they want you to identify the box that you belong in, but what happens if you don't belong in any of the categories in their minds? So maybe Zen is not a sect, and maybe Zen is not a non-sect either. It is the reality of the thing that matters, and not the name they call it. I think that sometimes in the name of prestigious traditions, we can do harm to people also. There are priests who do not practice, who are heads of big churches and temples, and yet they don't practice. They betray their own spiritual values. Although they are not called a sect, they are producing a lot of harm around them, causing people not to believe in the way any more. Therefore, I think we should help people to understand that what is important is the reality, the content of it, and not the words that are used to describe it.

(Bell)

The historical and the ultimate dimensions, are they separate or not separate?

I think that I have made it clear that the two dimensions belong to the same reality, and when you touch one dimension deeply, you touch the other dimension.

Dear Thay, when I understand the concept of the ultimate dimension, the way I can make sense of it is in terms the experiences that I have had, which in one sense belong to the historical dimension, because I have had these experiences directly. And yet when we talk about historical and ultimate dimension as dimensions, and that they sometimes touch, I feel confused about whether the reality that I experience has these dimensions both at the same time, or somehow I live in the historical dimension most of the time, but occasionally I can see the ultimate dimension, which is somewhere else.

I think that continued practice is the answer, because in the beginning there may be short moments when we are capable of touching the ultimate dimension, but if we keep the practice, if we know how to touch more deeply, to look deeply, then even if we are in the historical dimension, we can also touch the ultimate dimension. You don't have to stop being a wave to begin to be water. You are a wave; you think that you are only a wave, but if you touch yourself deeply, you will find out that you are also the water at the same time. So the answer is that you don't have to stop being a wave in order to be water—you are water already.

In one of the sutras it is said that you don't have to look for Nirvana, you have been Nirvanized for a long time. You are already dwelling in Nirvana. Your nature is the nature of no-birth and no-death. Let us look into the nature of a wave. First of all, a wave imagines that she is this wave, and that she is not the other waves. How could I be this wave, and all the waves at the same time? My wave is limited, my existence is limited. I have a beginning, I have an end, and I am less beautiful than you are, or I am higher than the other wave. All these kind of notions—we live superficially in the historical dimension and we get caught in these notions. But in the same dimension, the historical dimension, if you know how to touch more deeply that dimension, you discover that even your form is conditioned by all the other waves, that the one is made of the all; and you are not limited by this form, you are at the same time the other.

The nature of interbeing shows you that you are everything, that is why it will release you from the idea that you are only this: "This body is me; if this body is dissolved, there will be no me." That is the beginning. Master Tang Hoi recommended that we release that kind of idea. So the enlightened people, when they release this body, when they let go of this body, they do not have the feeling that they are lost, that they are no longer there. You are a multitude, you are large; if you identify yourself with one form, one sound, one feeling, you will be subject to fear, to limitation. That is why it is perfectly possible that while being a wave you can live the life of the water, and you can live the life of all the waves at the same time. It is like a mother who is capable of living the life of her sons and daughters. It is like a teacher who can live the life of all his students. To him, the leaving of this body is nothing, because he has so many bodies.

One day a novice was massaging my back, and I asked him, "My child, do you think that this back is mine? Do you think that tomorrow this back will no longer be here for you to massage, that I will stop being?" and he said, "No, Dear Thay, this back is not you. You have many other backs, and I will continue to massage them all my life. My own back is your back, and the backs of my older and younger brothers are also your back." That is the practice of looking deeply. Looking deeply has the power to bring you insight that can liberate you from your fear, from your tendency to identify yourself with such forms, such sounds, such touch, such odor, etc.

(Bell)

Thay, what is the purpose of our emotions? Why do we have a physiological expression of emotions like crying or sobbing when we are sad, shaking or sweating when we are frightened? I believe most animals don't cry like humans.

The body is involved in all our sensations, feelings, and emotions. What happens in the realm of the physiological will have an

effect on the realm of the mental, and vice-versa. Even if you don’t want to express your emotion and your feeling physiologically, your body will express it anyway. As practitioners, we should call on the positive elements in us, both physiological and mental, in cases of crisis. This is just intelligent practice. We have elements that are vulnerable in the realm of consciousness, we have elements that are vulnerable in the realm of the physiological, but we do have elements that are stable and that we can rely on in times of crisis.

So the answer is that when you get into a crisis, you should not allow yourself to be overwhelmed or crushed, or destroyed by the negative. People who are not practitioners do that, and they can hit the bottom of pain and suffering, and they cause suffering to the people around them. But for us practitioners that is not the way we do it. We have to call on the positive aspects within to help, and we also have the right to call on positive aspects around us to help, namely our Sangha, our brothers and sisters. Don’t lock yourself in behind your door, and fight alone. That is also the benefit of having a Sangha, a Dharma brother or sister. So in you there is the energy of mindfulness, the energy of understanding, the capacity of being peace—you have proved that sometimes you have the capacity of smiling, of being peace. Sometimes you have proved that you have the capacity of breathing mindfully in times of crisis. That is your natural, existing capacity; that is not something superficial, that is not there to suppress you, or to do something unnatural. It is as natural as the negative things. So every time you feel that the destructive energy is coming up, and you know that a storm is forming, then as a practitioner you know how to prepare for it, how to be ready for the storm. It’s like your house, your tent, when rain is coming, and there is wind, and you should know what to do in order to protect yourself against the storm.

We should not fight, we should not suppress. We should make ourselves available, ready to take care of it and to embrace it, whether that is fear, or despair, or anger, or jealousy. Our bodies may have the capacity of sitting still in a position that can help. The position of our bodies plays a role in our emotions and in our feelings. Walking mindfully is also a wonderful means to prepare ourselves. Going back to our breath and breathing mindfully and deeply is a wonderful practice. If we know how to mobilize all of these elements, then we will not be afraid, whatever emotion, whatever feeling, whatever fear and despair comes up, we will be ready to greet it and embrace it: "Darling, I am here for you; don’t worry, I will take good care of you, like a mother taking care of her baby." I always recommend that we practice daily in order to get ready for these difficult moments. We should not wait for these strong storms to arrive in order to start the practice—it may be a little bit too late.

The practice is that when the emotions come up we have to put ourselves into a position that is the most stable, and we should not dwell on the level of our thinking and our emotions. We should go down, because we are like a tree with roots. When there is a storm the little branches and the leaves on the top will be the first victims. They sway back and forth very violently in the wind, and when we look at the top of the tree, we feel that the tree is very vulnerable and can be broken at any time. But when we direct our gaze to the trunk of the tree, and we see that the tree is deeply rooted in the soil, we have another feeling. We feel that the tree will stand. At that moment the more helpful thing to do is to direct our attention to our roots, and physiologically our roots are somewhere here, a little bit below our navel. If you go back to your in-breath and out-breath, and breathe mindfully, and pay attention to the rise and fall of your abdomen, and continue that practice you will be in the safest situation, and no emotion can get you down.

We should know that an emotion is something that comes, that stays for a while, and finally will have to go. If we know how to be our best during this moment, we will be able to handle that emotion easily. There are many young people who don’t know anything about that art, and who suffer so much when they are taken by a strong emotion. They may suffer so much that they believe that the only way to end the suffering is to kill themselves. That is why so many young people have committed suicide. They don’t understand that they are so much more than their emotions. You are much more than your emotions. Why do you have to die because of one emotion? That we have to know by heart: one emotion is something that comes, stays, and will go away, and if you know how to behave during that time, you are safe.

You might like to be in that physical position, and you might continue your mindful breathing, paying attention only to the belly: breathing in, rising; breathing out, falling. During the time of the storm you just take refuge in that solid cave. The root of your tree is here. I am sure that after ten or fifteen minutes the emotion will subside, and if you have succeeded once, then you will have faith in the practice, and you will no longer be afraid. You know that next time, when a strong emotion comes, you will do the same. But as I said, we should not wait until such a time comes to begin training ourselves. We have to train ourselves right now, every day practicing that kind of breathing in that position for a number of minutes. After something like three or four weeks, it will become a good habit, because the practice is enjoyable. When you practice like that you stop all your thinking, and you just enjoy your breathing and your sitting. And if the emotions come, you will remember to practice. It is quite possible to teach your child to do this, because your child can be the victim of strong emotions. In the beginning, when you see him or her in crisis, you can come close and sit down, saying: "Darling, take my hand; let’s practice breathing in with Mommy: breathing in, my stomach is rising. Do you see your stomach rising? Breathing out, my stomach is falling. Let’s do it again: in, out, rising, falling." In a few minutes your child will feel much better, because you have brought your mindfulness and your stability to support your child. Later on your child will be able to do it by herself alone. If you share the practice with the young people, the teenagers, the practice may save their lives. The practice is not difficult. It needs to be done every day, a little bit—that is all.

(Three bells)

(End of Dharma talk)